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ABSTRACT

Although undergraduate enrollment in communication curricula grew during the 1970s, only a limited number of small colleges developed their offerings in the mass communications area. Faced with developing a mass communication curriculum and launching a new department with limited staff and equipment resources, one small Pennsylvania college established a core curriculum of courses required of all communication majors. Its three basic and traditional content courses are Introduction to Mass Communication, Theories of Mass Communication, and Mass Media Law and Regulation. The second part of the core curriculum requires students to complete at least one course each in production, writing, research, and applied media experience. The second half of the curriculum provides four options from which to choose: advertising, broadcasting, journalism, and public relations. Students can complete the departmental core and the requirements of one option with about 13 or 14 courses. Using the same course structure, a minor has also been developed in mass communications. The total program involves six departments, each contributing one or more courses to the various options or other requirements of the curriculum. There is no question that revisions and adjustments will need to be made on the basis of experiences with this curriculum, including some kind of apprenticeship options, but students are accepting this program in increasing numbers. (HTH)

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A COMPREHENSIVE INTERDISCIPLINARY MASS COMMUNICATION PROGRAM FOR A SMALL COLLEGE

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A COMPREHENSIVE INTERDISCIPLINARY MASS COMMUNICATION PROGRAM FOR A SMALL COLLEGE

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In the decade spanning the 1970's undergraduate enrollment in communication curricula has grown at a rate comparable to such glamour disciplines as business administration, accounting, and engineering. Because this growth period began with an extremely modest base the numbers of students enrolling were not nearly as great as the areas mentioned above for comparison, but an overall view does provide some impressive data. If one studies the annual reports of freshman enrollment in four year colleges as reported by the Chronicle of Higher Education, the trend emerges clearly. In 1970 the number of new freshmen in communications was less than 1% of the total. As a benchmark we can note that in the same year such traditional liberal arts areas as English, history, and foreign languages were each enrolling about 4% to 5% of the new freshmen every year.

By 1981 the communication share of the new enrollees had gone up to 4% while the share of the benchmark areas had slipped to less than 1%. Many factors no doubt contributed to this major shift of student interest. Economic conditions led students to seek out fields with clearer relationships with job opportunities; the academic discipline of communication widened the scope and substance of its courses and curricula; and the electronic segment of the communication industry enjoyed significant growth and prosperity.

On the other hand only a limited number of small colleges were developing their offerings in the growth areas of communication and mass communication. Traditionally broad ranging mass communication programs have been concentrated, with few notable exceptions, in larger institutions. Again many factors have

probably contributed to this pattern of development. In spite of the role of classical rhetoric in the patrimony of modern communication studies, many if not most professors and administrators who were of a liberal arts background, did not perceive communication as part of, or compatible with the traditional liberal arts disciplines. Most small colleges have tended to be built upon the traditional liberal arts disciplines, and feeling that they could not be all things to all students, have ignored communication and many other so called "career oriented disciplines." Finally many smaller colleges have been intimidated by the notion that communication, and especially mass communication, would have high start up costs.

My problem in developing the mass communication curriculum reported in this paper was to launch a new department with limited staff and equipment resources. At the same time I wanted to preserve a central core of courses which would provide an identity for the program. The solution was to establish a core curriculum of courses required of all majors. We began with three basic and traditional content courses found in many mass communication programs. These courses were Introduction to Mass Communication; Theories of Mass Communication; and Mass Media Law and Regulation. I should point out that Lycoming College operated under a unit system in which the basic course is a four semester hours credit course, but each full term course carries one unit of academic credit and the normal student course load is four units or 16 hours of class per week.

The second part of the core curriculum involved a series of types of experiences in four areas. In each of the areas students have a number of courses to chose from, but they are required to complete at least one course in each area. The four areas are: production, writing, research, and an applied media

experience. I would like to describe each of these areas briefly. In the production segment of the core they may chose from such alternatives as Television Production, and Typographic Composition. In the writing segment, which is in addition to the usual college composition requirements, there is a choice from Newswriting, Radio and Television Scriptwriting, and an English Department course in Writing for Special Audiences.

In the third segment of Research Methodology no Communication Department courses are offered for two basic reasons. First, there were compatible courses already available in four departments: Political Science, Sociology, Psychology, and Business Management. Secondly, the small size of the department precluded offering the number of courses required to cover all of the aspects of the curriculum. However in the Research segment the student may chose from Public Opinion and Polling, Research Methods in Sociology, Experimental or Social Psychology, and Marketing Research. In the fourth and final segment of Applied Media Experience the student has a choice of an Internship, Practicum, or Independent Study. Thus far more than 90% of the majors have elected the Internship. The four areas of Production, Writing, Research, and Media Experience, plus the three previously mentioned theory courses comprise the core curriculum for all communication majors in our program.

The second half of the curriculum provides four options from which each student is required to select one. Students often select and complete two options since there is considerable overlap between options. The four options are Advertising, Broadcasting, Journalism, and Public Relations. Each option draws upon other departments for several of the courses making up the option. I will simply list the courses and then discuss the options in a general way.

The required courses for Advertising are: Advertising, Marketing Management, Public Opinion and Polling, Layout and Design, Typographic Composition, Fundamentals of Oral Communication, Photography or Two-dimensional Design, and Creative Advertising.

The required courses in the Broadcasting are: Newswriting, Fundamentals of Oral Communication, Mass Media Law and Regulation, Radio Programming and Production, Television Production, Radio and Television Scriptwriting, and Introduction to Film. This option draws from three departments while the Advertising option involves four departments.

The Journalism option includes the following courses: Writing for Special Audiences, Newswriting, Political Newswriting, State and Local Government, Racial and Cultural Minorities, Public Opinion and Polling, Photography, and Typographic Composition. Four departments are involved in this option.

The fourth and final option is in Public Relations and the following courses are required: Fundamentals of Oral Communication, Public Relations and Publicity, Television Production, Photography, Writing for Special Audiences, Newswriting, Marketing Management, and Public Opinion and Polling. These requirements are drawn from the offerings of five departments.

Since some overlap exists between the option requirements and the four experience area requirements of writing, research, production, and applied media experience, students may use option requirements to meet the course requirements or the departmental core curriculum. There are no general education or distribution requirements built into the program because each student must meet the extensive distribution requirements of the college which are designed to provide a broad general liberal arts education.

We have found that students can complete the departmental core and the requirements of one option with about thirteen or fourteen courses. The distribution requirements of the college can be met with twelve courses if the student is reasonably well prepared and does not need to make up deficiencies in such background skills as mathematics or English composition. Students can therefore complete all of their requirements with from 25 to 27 courses. A student electing a normal load of four courses per semester will complete at least 32 courses during eight semesters of enrollment, thus allowing for at least five to seven electives. Some students chose to use three or four electives to complete a second option within the department, or students may complete a minor consisting of four courses in another department.

Using the same course structure a minor has also been developed in mass communication. In conformance with college practices the minor consists of four courses with only one course, Introduction to Mass Communication, being mandatory. Students may select any three from a group of six courses to complete the minor. The six courses include: Fundamentals of Oral Communication, Television Production, Radio and Television Scriptwriting, Radio Programming and Production, Theories of Mass Communication, and Mass Media Law and Regulation.

The total program involves six departments who each contribute one or more courses to the various options or other requirements of the curriculum. The six cooperating departments which include English, Political Science, Business, Psychology, Sociology, and Art are all represented on an Advisory Committee to insure regular communication between the cooperating departments and the Communication Department.

No doubt every curriculum has its shortcomings and its weak points, but in its relatively short period of operation this plan seems to be working reasonably well. Students have accepted the program in increasing numbers so that during its first semester of operation some 75 students have signed on as majors, making the new Mass Communication major the fourth largest in the college. Business ranks first in number of students, followed by Biology, and Accounting. We feel that these enrollments ranking behind two of the major growth disciplines of Business and Accounting, indicates significant student acceptance. Individual Mass Communication course enrollments for the current semester are substantial with a range of 12 in Television Production to a high of 57 in Introduction to Mass Communication. The mean enrollment for this semester is 29 students per section which is considerably above the mean for the college.

A longer term experience will be needed before more than the most tentative conclusions can be posited, but it seems reasonable to conclude that the program has gotten off to a satisfactory start. In terms of scheduling of courses, faculty schedules, and support services the curriculum seems to be quite workable for a small college.

There is no question that revisions and adjustments will be made on the basis of experience with this curriculum. Like many other programs negotiation and compromise were involved in the development of the final form the mass communication major emerged in. The first modification I have in mind at the present time is to establish an entity which will probably be titled "Mass Communication Laboratory" or some close synonym. We plan to permit students to sign up under this rubric for academic credit of one hour per semester, or one-quarter of a unit, for laboratory experience on the campus FM radio station, or the campus

newspaper. This "Communication Laboratory" would be repeatable up to a maximum of four semesters. This would mean that a student who carried a responsible position on either the FM station or the newspaper for two academic years or four semesters would earn the equivalent of 1 unit or four semester hours of credit.

A major question is, can this curriculum or one similar to it be developed in the mythical but typical small traditional liberal arts college? If the traditional liberal arts college has a moderately strong and well developed Art Department and a comparable Business Administration program, the supporting base should be there to develop a program patterened from this curriculum as outlined. Where certain specific courses utilized in this program are not presently offered, competant liberal arts departments should be able to plan and offer such courses by drawing upon existing faculty.

Students today are seeking career oriented majors, while small colleges tend to stress theory and a broader liberal arts education. The mass communication program described in this paper may turn out to be a successful blend of what at first glance seems to be two differing demands.